

within reach. You'll be up and down the stairs—"

"And I'll be on the sands."

"For tuppence she'd be on the donkeys too, wouldn't she, Geordie?"

"I would that."

"Those days are over for us."

"I've often thought, Mrs Blair, that they

needn't be if someone would only start growing them bigger. Those Americans—"

"Engineers," said Father. "The largest donkey anyone can get, Nanny, is a large mule and that's where it ends because all mules are mares and they can't breed."

"Stubborn things," said Nanny as the front door closed.

Snowdonia

No longer as when a boy I now
 Can float up the varieties of a mountain:
 From the time when I could do this how
 Changed. No, no more will it come back again.
 Great sadness would be in this if I did not
 Discern a new way of going like fresh apparel
 And as one way perishes with my ageing body, a new route
 Unfolds itself so that it is both greeting and farewell.
 What do I greet? It is the closure of
 Certain obvious kinds of physical celebration
 Makes me turn to what did not exist when with extreme love
 I could marry my body to the rocks. Clearer
 Now I turn to what stays when the body cannot do this
 And know that to the nerve I am coming nearer.
 It is death we are born for. So I libidinise that vacuum
 And strenuously as when I strove up the rock edges
 Practise that summit to which I must come.

Thomas Blackburn

The Sense of Dispossession

IT IS NOT SO MUCH facts as theories which shape world-views. We are familiar today with the way in which political theory and practice derive both structure and colour from the organisation and selection of facts by powerful intelligences or by a powerful intellectual tradition. What F. A. Hayek calls “the primacy of the abstract” reinforces itself with the passage of time. As a theory gathers support, its underpinning of factual observation becomes more and more remote from the centre of the debate. Discussion of the theory itself takes on a life of its own. The theory’s relation to reality is cursorily assumed. The theory reaches its apotheosis both when it is incorporated into the academic curriculum and when it comes to form part of the language of public debate, even to the extent of a political party gathering around its ideological banner. A theory which has failed to reach this level of popularity remains in close contact with the material evidence supporting it. This is no doubt an honourable relation, but a theory in this position has little effect on thought or action. It has no power either to illuminate or to alter the world, remaining as it does hardly more than an observation.

A certain well-known explanation of a congeries of even better known modern events has, in my view, reached and failed to go beyond just such an undeveloped stage. The events themselves are so important that this explanation deserves to be elaborated, rather than just accepted as an evident and unfruitful truth. For if the explanation is correct it ought to saturate both our thoughts and our actions. It ought to be isolated so that it can conveniently be referred to and brought into play without laborious preliminaries, just as we can lay our hands on such concepts as “the Revolution of Rising Expectations” or “the Class War.” I should emphasise therefore that I do not hope to startle the reader in my collocation of public events or in my development of a single explanation for them. My aim is simply to show that we have not thought enough about that explanation, nor given it the priority in our calculations which it deserves.

WHAT I AM REFERRING TO is perhaps best described as “the sense of dispossession.” We have known this phenomenon under many names and forms through the ages which stretch from the psalmist’s lament “How shall we sing the Lord’s song in a strange land?” down to the insouciance of black Olympic athletes during the playing of *The Star-Spangled Banner*. The sense of dispossession has been the cause of innumerable fears, hatreds, riots, expulsions and above all massacres. Because of it we live in a century of refugees and pogroms. We also live in a century whose dominant literary and psychological theme is that of alienation, of man’s estrangement from himself, his work and his world. We cannot in fact make any true separation between the inner and the outer senses of loss. The political and the psychological permeate and reflect one another. The loss of home, the resentments of physical exile, the deprivation of the familiar things and relationships which give meaning and relish to life, these shade into the less material sense in which we say that a man feels he is an outsider, a stranger, an alien.

A WIDE VARIETY OF contemporary tragedies have as their motive forces this sense of dispossession. What drives young Arabs to commit acts of unspeakable barbarism—acts which more often than not cost them their own lives—is clearly the sense that they have been robbed of the lands of their fathers and that in the process their own culture has been brutally smashed by the invaders. Even optimistic believers in *kebab-Arabism* (cf. “goulash-Communism”) would hardly claim that better food, housing, and sanitation for the Palestinian refugees would dispel such resentments. I must stress here that I do not wish to fall into the heresy of “not condoning and yet condoning”—a practice rightly condemned by Bernard Levin and others. I wish to explain, not excuse. The foulest barbarity must have some explanation, though it may not be one which has a political remedy.